SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL’S REVIEW OF LOCAL COMMITTEES

GUILDFORD LOCAL COMMITTEE
29th January 2004

KEY ISSUE:

Following a review of local committees’ first year of operation, Surrey County Council’s (SCC) Executive agreed on a series of recommendations to inform the future development of local committees across the county. Guildford Local Committee is asked to consider the impact and implications of the Executive’s decisions and, in particular, how it wishes to further develop its strong partnership approach for the future.

SUMMARY:

SCC has made a big investment in local committees. It is prudent to review progress after their first year of operation and, following the Executive’s decisions, to consider the impacts and opportunities in Guildford. SCC’s How the Council Manages Its Business Group considered the detailed findings of the review of local committees. As part of the review itself all local committee chairmen, other SCC Members and service managers, Borough and District Members and Chief Executives, Partner agencies and many of the public who attend local committees were consulted on their effectiveness.
OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to:

(i) Comment on the recommendations of the SCC Executive on the future of local committees in Surrey, to inform the Implementation Plan being developed.

(ii) Identify ways to strengthen the accountability links and strategic priorities between Guildford Local Committee, Guildford Local Strategic Partnership and the Safer Guildford Partnership.

(iii) Identify the principles to inform the formal procedure for the Local Committee to feed its views to the SCC Executive. Also to suggest a parallel process to feed its views to the GBC Executive.

(iv) Agree on the desirability of holding a Diversity Workshop to address the requirements and opportunities of recent changes in equalities legislation.

1. INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

1.1 One of SCC’s three key aims is to become “an exemplar of modern local democracy”. Local committees were set up to make 2-way links between what SCC plans strategically and what it delivers locally. The first time the County Council has attempted a well developed, team-based and community-based approach to putting people first. There have been successes but there are also many things that we can and should learn.

1.2 The review of local committees has produced a broadly positive response about their first year of operation. Surrey’s local committees are now seen nationally as being a model of good practice for local working.

1.3 The Review made a number of proposals to:

   - improve the influence of local committees
   - build stronger working relationships with partners
   - generally improve joint working

1.4 SCC Executive has formally agreed the following recommendations, that:

   i. Local committees develop their future role by enhancing their influence over the local plans of other SCC services as well as transportation. In line with the priority identified in the mid-term review, they should begin with community services, starting with the Youth Development Service.

   ii. Borough/district councillors be invited to continue to participate in local committees and vote on transportation issues. Local committee chairmen
discuss with leading Members of borough/district councils mutually acceptable ways of improving joint working.

iii. Borough/district councils be asked if they could seek the views of local committees on major planning applications and planning briefs, and to discuss with them the uses of section 106 developer contributions, particularly where these involve transportation issues.

iv. The importance of media support for local committees is endorsed, and communications staff review with local directors how we publicise local committees to enhance their profile.

v. Local allocations for Members continue, although the amount may vary subject to the budget available.

vi. Services involve local committees earlier in the policy development process. Local committee chairmen and service managers consider further what role local committees should have in seeking to secure local service improvements.

vii. Services incorporate the suggestions made by the Head of Performance Improvement into future performance reports to local committees.

viii. That local committees have access to a formal process for bringing matters before the Executive and that this should be proposed for inclusion in the Council’s Constitution at the Annual County Council Meeting.

1.5 The next stage is for an Implementation Plan to be drawn up by the Community Support Service to be implemented as soon as possible, although a number of the recommendations (viz. iii), vi) & viii) above) will need further negotiation or decision by the full Council before being formally implemented.

1.6 Guildford Local Committee are asked to consider how the Review recommendations should be implemented locally. In particular, the Committee are asked how it wishes to further develop its particularly strong partnership approach, given that it has led the way countywide with the breadth of that partnership working.

2. **ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY**
Taking each of the recommendations in turn, this section looks at the Guildford context for the operation and aspirations of the Committee itself.

2.1 **Influencing local plans of other SCC services, as well as transportation.**
It is inevitable that, at this stage, measuring the direct impact of the Guildford Local Committee on the plans of SCC services might be difficult to pin down. However, the Committee has not been shy in making clear its hopes and expectations of individual services. SCC Executive has now formally decided that local committees are to have a strong and direct local influence on the plans of Community Services. This will begin with the Youth Development Service (who are currently consulting the Local Committee on their draft Borough Plan for 2004/5) but will also roll out from next year on the other community services, i.e. Libraries, Adult & Community Learning, and Culture.
2.2 The interface between SCC, GBC and other partners’ services is recognised by the number of joint reports to the Committee, for example on Adults, Health and Social Care, and Youth/Leisure/Connexions. This has been partially successful but perhaps needs to be developed further by SCC and GBC agreeing a wider range of jointly delivered services that should be formally reported to both the Local Committee and GBC Executive.

2.3 **Boroughs/Districts continue to participate in local committees.** The partnership approach that existed in Guildford before the start of local committees has been maintained and extended on some fronts (such as community planning and community safety). The local context is especially important here in that GBC Members speak in Committee on non-transportation as well as transportation matters, albeit without a formal vote. This is a strong feature in Guildford that makes it distinct from the other local committees. This commitment to joint working at Member and officer level is important for all local authority services, regardless of whether SCC or GBC provide them. Having said this, there are further areas for the Committee to influence service plans in the areas of Community Safety; Community Planning and Self Reliance.

2.4 There are opportunities to further link the work of the Local Committee to that of the Local Strategic Partnership and the Safer Guildford Partnership. To date, these areas of activity have been only reported to the Local Committee in the form of annual progress reports. However, the Committee has helpfully also nominated Veronica Stiastny (on Community Safety) and David Davis (on Community Planning) to be the formal representatives of the Local Committee on these important partnerships. Over and above this, the Committee may wish to identify other ways to ensure that joint working is extended.

2.5 **Boroughs/Districts to seek the informal views of local committees on major planning applications and planning briefs.** As indicated in Para 1.5 above, this recommendation will need careful negotiation, at a county as well as at a Guildford level. The idea here is that the views and aspirations of local committees could be informally fed into the planning process at an early stage to outline the broad aspects of local service and infrastructure planning. The local committees have an important overview of what is needed on the ground that could enhance the planning brief process and on the future uses of Section 106 contributions. In addition there may opportunities for the local committees to comment on specific other planning applications where there are sensitive transportation implications.

2.6 Of necessity, the local committees cannot represent the formal legal position of SCC at a later stage when planning applications are being decided, but could have a useful influencing role in advocating joined up service planning.

2.7 The next stage will be SCC Head of Planning & Countryside for discussion at Surrey Planning Officers Association to draft a protocol on this. This draft protocol would then need to be negotiated with each Borough/District and then reported to the local committees. It is anticipated that a further report on this will come to the Guildford Local Committee by July 2004.
2.8 **Media Support for local committees.** Each local committee has a limited amount of media adviser capacity added to it to ensure that the work of the committee is known about and that the public and other stakeholders know how to access the meetings and raise local issues of concern. The profile of SCC has been raised considerably by the work of the local committees and 73% of press articles had positive news about SCC services or formal decisions.

2.9 However it is apparent that the public are not fully aware of local committees and the publicity for them is not yet getting through effectively. It is agreed that SCC communications staff and the local directors review the publicity arrangements. The views and expectations of the Guildford Local Committee on this aspect are sought.

2.10 **Use of Members of Revenue Funds.** The Guildford Local Committee has used the Members Revenue Funds in a variety of ways and in a number of instances has used the funds to access or encourage external funding to be sought. Whilst Members have usually applied these funds to directly benefit communities, projects or services in their own divisions, there have been recent examples of Members pooling funds across the borough (for instance, Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Youth Group; Self Reliance activities).

2.11 The SCC Executive have agreed in principle to continue such funds for the next 3 years, although the actual amount may vary according to the budget available. The views of the Committee are sought on how more effective use could be made of these funds.

2.12 **SCC Services involve local committees earlier in the policy development process.** One of the areas that the Local Committee Review felt could be developed further was that, with the exception of transportation, other services did not fully understand the role of local committees or the mutual benefit of SCC services engaging better with local committees. There is a resource issue for services in preparing and attending local committees and also in providing locally focussed information. However, the gains for services are already being evidenced and they are to be encouraged to extend this engagement with local committees.

2.13 The next stage would be for the local committee chairmen (and local directors) to meet with SCC service managers to consult on what role local committees should have in securing service improvements. Specific proposals would then go back to SCC Executive for approval.

2.14 **Improvements to future Performance Reports to local committees.** From different perspectives there were areas for improvement in the format and content of service reports to local committees. Members reported that some reports were hard to understand and not sufficiently focussed. A number of services locally have over the last year moved to a position of providing more locally focussed information and with a clearer emphasis on outcomes. Service managers recognised the benefits that could flow from engaging with Members locally, but that for some services there was sometimes a tension
between what local committees want locally and the drive for consistency from the Executive and the government.

2.15 SCC’s Head of Performance Improvement has analysed a number of performance reports in depth and has made specific suggestions to improve performance reports across the board. Further learning opportunities will be offered to services to enable managers to contribute more fully to this key way of enabling SCC to become an exemplar of modern local democracy.

2.16 Relationship between SCC Executive and local committees. The Review highlighted that local committees felt that the Executive was not always sufficiently responsive to local opinion and that a formal mechanism was needed to capture local views to be fed directly to the Executive.

2.17 For their part, the Executive recognised that local committees had on occasions presented views that they had disagreed with or that officers presenting reports to the Executive, often presented local committee views too late in the decision making process. The Executive wants to see this area, of policy and decision making improved and has agreed that a procedure be developed that local committees can feed their views to the Executive in a similar way that Select Committees report. This would enable local committees to formally put their views forward and receive a response from the Executive.

2.18 This new procedure once developed would need to be added to SCC’s Constitution at the Annual County Council meeting on 4 May 2004.

3. CONSULTATIONS

Across the county a wide number of stakeholders and interested parties were given the opportunity to comment on the effectiveness of the local committees. This included all SCC Members, all local committee chairmen, SCC service managers, borough and district Members and Chief Executives, partner agencies, members of the public and the media.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As set out in Para 1.4v) and 2.11, above, SCC Executive have agreed to continue the Member Revenue Allocation, subject to possible variations due to the budget available.

5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct environmental impacts from this report, over and above the commitment of SCC to ensure the delivery of sustainable resources generally.

6. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

Paras. 2.3 & 2.4 specify the opportunity for the Local Committee to further align its activities to the Safer Guildford Partnership and its Community Safety strategy.
7. **EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

The SCC Community Support Service is committed to implementing SCC Action for Equalities Policy and new legislation that has recently been implemented (Disability Discrimination Act; Employment Equality regulations; Race Relations – Amendment Act Regulations). It is proposed that a half-day Diversity Workshop is held for the Guildford Local Committee to consider the implications. This could be helpful in enabling both the Local Committee and the Guildford Community Support Team to broaden access to the work of the Local Committee.

8. **SELF RELIANCE IMPLICATIONS**

The Guildford Local Committee has already received an Annual Report on Self Reliance at its 6 November 2003 meeting. It is due to receive a further report on an updated Guildford Area Profile at its next meeting on 11 March 2004. This Area Profile will be used to inform the Local Committee and local services on the levels of needs and geographic areas that should be targeted in the future.

9. **CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Review of local committees, after their first year of operation, has shown clear evidence of their effectiveness, with some areas for development. The SCC Executive has made formal decisions to continue and further extend the partnership and influencing roles of local committees. Within Guildford, the Local Committee already has a strong history and has built a strong basis of partnership; the Committee is being asked to comment on the Review and to identify areas for further development.

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**BACKGROUND PAPERS:** The Future of Local Committees in Surrey”; Report to SCC Executive, 6 January 2004 and Minutes of SCC Executive, 6 January 2004.